NARRP is dedicated to the proposition that the welfare of the nation’s citizens, visitors, communities, environment, and economy will be enhanced through opportunities for the public to experience and enjoy our nation’s lakes, rivers, forests, wilderness, open space, greenways, parks, marine preserves, wildlife refuges, historic sites, heritage areas, and other special outdoor places.

www.narrp.org

SUPPORT FOR THE
Great Outdoors America

A POSITION PAPER OF THE
National Association of Recreation Resource Planners

PRESENTED TO THE HONORABLE
Mr. Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior

SEPTEMBER, 2009
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To the Honorable Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar:

“Treasured Landscapes” is an evocative term. It is reminiscent of Wallace Stegner’s famous Wilderness Letter that so aptly described the highest ideals of preservation. Yet, we must remember that the most important landscapes in peoples’ lives are often less grand than Yellowstone or Yosemite National Parks. They include those everyday landscapes where people walk, bike, play ball and picnic. Treasured landscapes include the local parks, forests, wetlands, natural areas and open spaces that are closest to our homes; that is, our “back-forty.”

The National Association of Recreation Resource Planners (NARRP) supports the need for a coordinated system, and a full spectrum of treasured landscapes from urban to wildlands.

NARRP is a professional non-partisan association formed in 1983. It is comprised of recreation resource planners and planners of related disciplines from local, state and federal agencies, the private sector, conservation groups and academia.

Last year, we challenged ourselves with the question of what is needed to ensure the provision and conservation of recreation resources for the next 50 years. We engaged a diverse committee of practicing recreation resource professionals, convened a national conference, and consulted with a number of federal resource agencies. We are pleased to submit our report entitled Support for the Great Outdoors America.

What NARRP proposes is not new, visionary, or revolutionary. Our position largely reflects the wisdom of the 1962 Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission and the many other commissions, conferences, hearings, reports, articles, and speeches since that time.

We hope this position paper will add to the current national dialogue about how the welfare of the nation’s citizens, outdoor recreationists, communities, environment, and economy can be enhanced over the next 50 years.

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NARRP’s Position

The National Association of Recreation Resource Planners (NARRP) concurs with the recommendations of the Outdoor Resources Review Group published in Great Outdoors America (June 2009). But we would like to offer some additional emphasis, detail and clarity by submitting three key recommendations with implementation strategies.

The key recommendations are:

1. Establish Inter-Departmental National Leadership
2. Reposition the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program
3. Reframe the Role and Relevancy of Statewide Comprehensive Planning
Establish Inter-Departmental National Leadership

Efforts towards national leadership and coordination among state and federal providers of outdoor recreation can be traced back over the 20th Century. Early examples to link state and federal agencies include the 1924 and 1928 National Conferences on Outdoor Recreation. The patriarch of efforts to enhance national leadership and coordination was the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC).


ORRRC was truly visionary. Its findings and recommendations had a profound effect on the provision for recreation opportunities and the conservation of recreation resources in the Nation. ORRRC provided credibility, respect, and recognition for outdoor recreation as a significant societal benefit and value, an industry, a profession, a career, and a field of study. ORRRC also was the impetus for landmark legislation in the 1960s, significant dollars for public land acquisition and development, designation of many new outdoor recreation areas and acreages, and initiation of statewide comprehensive planning.

But of particular relevance to this first recommendation, ORRRC saw the need for national leadership, vision and judgment, and its recommendations were the catalyst for the formation of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR).

STRATEGY 1. Establish an inter-departmental national coordinating council under the Secretary of the Interior to provide national leadership, vision, judgment and collaboration across the 20 or so agencies involved with recreation resources.

Similar to the recommendation by the 1962 ORRRC, this council could serve a number of important roles:

- Development of a comprehensive national outdoor recreation resource strategy every 10 years,
- Implementation of an on-going national recreation demand/trend assessment as a valuable resource to all local, state and federal recreation providers, the private sector, land trusts and special interests groups,
- Facilitation of regional or landscape-scale recreation resource planning cooperatives for enhanced collaboration and cooperation,
- Information and technology transfer of science, data, tools, best practices and “lessons learned”,
- Administration of the Land and Water Conservation Fund program, and
- Support and guidance to improve the efficacy of Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans.

NARRP believes a national coordinating council should (a) be established by and report to the Secretary of the Interior, (b) operate with its own budget and staff, and (c) have national-level liaisons to the 20 or so federal agencies involved with outdoor recreation resources. There is precedent for inter-departmental coordinating bodies in the Department of the Interior.

For example, the National Invasive Species Council was created by an Executive Order and provides national coordination, a national plan, and an information center. The Council is an inter-departmental body that “helps coordinate and ensure complementary, cost-efficient, and effective federal activities regarding invasive species”. The Council members include the Secretaries of the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, State, Defense, Treasury, Transportation, Health and Human Services, as well as the administrators of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The Council has an independent operating budget and staff.

Another example is the Department of the Interior’s Office of Wildland Fire Coordination. It has an 8-person professional staff who reports to the DOI Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget. Its function is to implement and manage the Department’s wildland fire program in a safe, effective, efficient, and seamless manner to provide for coordinated efforts between the wildland fire management bureaus and other federal and non-federal groups.
Under the leadership of Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation was created in 1963. The BOR’s main responsibilities were directed toward assisting state and local governments to develop their outdoor recreation resources. To make it possible for the BOR to carry out its responsibilities, Congress passed the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act in 1965. In 1973, the BOR issued to the President the first Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan. In 1978, the BOR was reconstituted as the Heritage Conservation & Recreation Service (HCRS). In 1981, the HCRS was abolished for political reasons. This was a major step backwards for the outdoor recreation profession and industry.

Today, there is no unifying or coordinating federal governmental entity for the provision of recreation opportunities and the conservation of recreation resources, no formal interagency leadership, no national vision, no national policy, no national plan, no national management guidelines and standards, and no national repository of professional resources, tools, best practices, science, or data. NARRP believes that national leadership, vision, judgment, and coordination are vital for our next 50 years.

**STRATEGY 2.** The proposed inter-departmental national coordinating council should include a national public advisory council made up of stakeholders and respected professionals in recreation resource management and resource conservation.

The advisory council should represent the interests of local and state governments, outdoor recreation groups, tourism industry, health and wellness profession, conservation groups, land trusts, gateway communities, research and academia, and national special interest groups such as the National Recreation and Parks Association.

**STRATEGY 3.** Expand the mission and name of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sport to the President’s Council on Physical Fitness, Sport and Outdoor Recreation.

The contribution of outdoor recreation to the welfare of our Nation’s citizens, visitors, communities, environment, and economy is recognized by mainstream America. As such, public advocates should have a voice at the highest level of government and one which transcends any single administration.
Establish Inter-Departmental National Leadership

ORRRC concluded the following:

Providing adequate outdoor recreation opportunities for Americans over the next 40 years is a major challenge that will require investment of money, resources and work. Leadership, vision, and judgment will be needed to guide this investment into the most efficient channels. The present uncoordinated efforts cannot do the job. There must be a new agency of government at the Federal level to provide guidance and assistance to the other levels of government and to the private sector, as well as within the Federal Government itself. (Page 121)

A Bureau of Outdoor Recreation should be established in the Department of the Interior. This Bureau would have over-all responsibility for leadership of a nationwide effort by coordinating the various Federal programs and assisting other levels of government to meet the demands for outdoor recreation. It would not manage any land. This would continue to be the function of the existing managerial agencies. Specifically, the new Bureau would—

1. Coordinate the recreation activities of the more than 20 Federal agencies whose activities affect outdoor recreation.

2. Assist State and local governments with technical aid in planning and administration, including the development of standards for personnel, procedures, and operations.

3. Administer a grants-in-aid program to States for planning and for development and acquisition of needed areas.

4. Act as a clearinghouse for information and guide, stimulate, and sponsor research as needed.

5. Encourage interstate and regional cooperation, including Federal participation where necessary.

To assure that recreation policy and planning receive attention at a high level and to promote interdepartmental coordination, there should be established a Recreation Advisory Council, consisting of the Secretaries of Interior, Agriculture, and Defense, with the Secretary of the Interior as Chairman. Other agencies would be invited to participate on an ad hoc basis when matters affecting their interests are under consideration by the Council.

The Recreation Advisory Council would provide broad policy guidance on all matters affecting outdoor recreation activities and programs carried out by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. The Secretary of the Interior should be required to seek such guidance in the administration of the Bureau. (Page 9-10)
Reposition the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2015. The LWCF program has had a profound effect on federal and state land acquisition of public open space, infrastructure development, and on statewide comprehensive recreation resource planning. Its history and contributions are well chronicled at www.nps.gov/lwcf. NARRP has worked closely with the LWCF staff over the years and greatly respects their efforts and accomplishments.

The LWCF program was initially administered for some 20 years by the BOR and HCRS. Today it is administered by the National Park Service. More specifically, the LWCF program is administered by the Land and Water Conservation Fund office within the State and Local Assistance Program under the Deputy Director for Support Services who reports to the Director of the National Park Service.

In order to meet the challenges of the next 50 years, NARRP believes several strategies are necessary for repositioning the LWCF program.

**STRATEGY 1:** Configure stateside LWCF funding to receive a 50-50% split with the federal-side of the LWCF annual appropriations.

Local and state recreation resource agencies, communities, stakeholders, land trusts, and private sector interests are in the best position to ensure the conservation of “treasured landscapes” in our urban and suburban backyards. Close-to-home parks and nature centers, connecting greenways, waterways and byways, and even soccer fields and playgrounds deserve support in equal measure to the undeniable treasures of America’s iconic landscapes. Such a spectrum and system of national treasures is best conceived and achieved through local and state action, in collaboration with the federal managing agencies.

**STRATEGY 2:** The LWCF program should be re-positioned as part of the proposed national inter-departmental coordinating council, including all the funds and federal and state-side staff.

The LWCF program has evolved into a competition between federal-side and state-side budgets and programs. There appears to be little connection, communication and collaboration among the programs. Furthermore, there has been an increase in “new” programs funded out of LWCF, further diluting the LWCF monies. As it currently stands, the LWCF program is too fractured.

The LWCF program would be more effective and efficient with increased interagency planning, coordination, collaboration, and programmatic integration.

**STRATEGY 3:** A national recreation resource conservation strategy should be developed every 10-years for the benefit of local, state, federal agencies, land trusts, private businesses, tourism industry, communities and other stakeholders.

The national recreation resource strategy would benefit all the federal agencies involved in recreation planning and management, and as such, the strategy should be funded with federal-side LWCF monies.

The national strategy would be developed through a combination of (a) tiering-up information from the State SCORP plans, (b) an ongoing 5-year national recreation demand assessment supported by the LWCF program, (c) linkage to habitat conservation and other federal conservation plans, (d) input from state and federal organizations, and (e) input from the public advisory council proposed in the National Leadership section of this paper.

The strategy would offer a national vision, goals, direction, recreation demand projections, significant trends, SCORP accomplishments and outcomes, and other important information. The strategy would provide national leadership and a future direction but would not serve a regulatory function. It would also provide important societal tracking and trend analysis of outdoor recreation from the baseline analysis provided by ORRRC. SCORP efforts would benefit from a national strategy with its supporting information and data.
Reframe the Role and Relevancy of Statewide Comprehensive Planning

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 states the following:

_A comprehensive statewide outdoor recreation plan shall be required prior to the consideration by the Secretary of financial assistance for acquisition or development projects. The plan shall be adequate if, in the judgment of the Secretary, it encompasses and will promote the purposes of this Act. The plan shall contain—_

1. the name of the State agency that will have authority to represent and act for the State in dealing with the Secretary for purposes of this Act;
2. an evaluation of the demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities in the State;
3. a program for the implementation of the plan; and
4. other necessary information, as may be determined by the Secretary.

The plan shall take into account relevant Federal resources and programs and shall be correlated so far as practicable with other State, regional, and local plans.

STRATEGY 1: Reframe the role and relevancy of SCORPs.

The quality and utility of SCORP plans have varied over the past 45 years and across the States. This is in part due to SCORPs being viewed by some as simply the legislative requirement for accessing state-side LWCF monies. Regardless of the LWCF Act or the “carrot” of state-side LWCF monies, statewide comprehensive planning on a 5-year cycle is increasingly important for recreation and natural/cultural resource conservation. Several changes are needed:

- We must identify and strengthen the best practices used for integrated and comprehensive planning at a statewide-scale or other regional landscape-scale that is practical and meaningful.
- Statewide comprehensive planning needs to be more inclusive and inter-agency in nature. The benefactors of these plans should be expanded to include local, state and federal agencies, communities, non-profits, land trusts, the private sector, and other stakeholders.
- SCORPs have traditionally focused on setting priorities for funding new acquisitions and developments. NARRP recommends that going forward, they also consider how those priorities integrate with stewardship of existing protected resources, anticipate threats to those resources from land use changes, and outline strategies and priorities for mitigation of those impacts.
- The financial strategy to implement a statewide comprehensive plan should consider more than state-side LWCF dollars. There are many substantial sources of money within local, state and federal agencies (e.g., county open space referenda, state organizations such as Colorado’s GOCO), and among non-profits and the private sector to draw upon to implement a statewide comprehensive plan.
- The process may be more important than the plan. A good planning process will foster interagency cooperation, regional cooperatives, collaboration, and financial partnerships which can result in much greater benefits than a single plan over time. Planning will link recreation providers, build a system, and achieve the goals alluded to in the National Leadership section of this position paper.
- Statewide comprehensive planning is a state and federal responsibility which, in part, should coordinate and guide both state and federal recreation investments. This planning will also help other significant outdoor recreation providers who do not receive LWCF monies (e.g., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, state wildlife areas). Thus, NARRP believes that statewide comprehensive planning should be financed by both federal and state-side LWCF monies.
STRATEGY 2: NARRP recommends creating a separate transparent line-item in the annual LWCF budget for a Statewide Comprehensive Planning Program.

Statewide comprehensive plans should be inter-agency plans. The process should engage and benefit local, state and federal agencies, communities, non-profits, land trusts, the private sector, and other stakeholders. As such, the program should be funded by both federal and state-side LWCF monies.

NARRP believes the monies should be administered by a planning grants program within the inter-department national coordinating council. The program would foster the integrated planning of outdoor recreation and other key related resources such as wildlife, fisheries, water, historic sites and open space. The planning could be applied on a statewide-scale or some other regional landscape-scale that would be viewed as more practical and meaningful. The monies would ensure that an interagency planning team would have the time and resources to be effectively engaged throughout the planning process.

STRATEGY 3: With the advent of a national recreation resource conservation strategy every 10-years, and a supporting national recreation demand assessment every 5-years, SCORPs should become more integrative, comprehensive and action-oriented plans. A national strategy would enable statewide comprehensive planning teams to shift their time and effort more towards:

- Use of geospatial technology for integrated resource mapping, planning and long-term stewardship as epitomized by efforts of the National Geographic Society and ESRI.
- Linkages to youth, underserved populations, human wellness programs, educational systems, energy conservation and economic benefits.
- Integration of open-space, wildlife and water resource values.
- Coordination of state and federal land acquisition.
- Attention to unique and special issues in sub-regions of a state.
- Additional detail for implementation steps and schedule.
- Integration of performance measures and the collection of evidence on the efficacy and benefits of the LWCF program and for statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation planning.

STRATEGY 4: Support a public-private partnership to initiate a 5-year national statewide comprehensive planning R&D demonstration project.

Statewide comprehensive planning is a challenge for many reasons. Statewide planning requires cooperation and collaboration among multiple agencies, stakeholders, communities, and other organizations. Comprehensive planning means the consideration of outdoor recreation and all the related natural/cultural resources that affect or are affected by recreation use and management. Lastly, this type of planning involves a variety of tools, techniques, surveys, processes, studies, data, approaches, formats, and levels of detail.

While there is no single right way, NARRP believes that we should be further along in knowing what are the better ways for statewide comprehensive planning.

In this demonstration project, six states or other regional landscape-scale locations would be carefully selected to work together with an external team of regional recreation/conservation planning experts in order to systematically test and develop “best practices” for statewide comprehensive planning. The demonstration project would contrast, test and evaluate alternative approaches (i.e., information, tools, techniques) used in the different steps of a planning process, in the structure and content of the plan, and in the plan’s implementation and progress.

A statewide comprehensive planning R&D project would also benefit other statewide or regional landscape-scale planning efforts such as habitat conservation, watershed, and transportation planning. Lessons learned and best practices would be publicly shared.
NARRP’s Summary Position

Last year, NARRP challenged itself with the question of what is needed to ensure the provision and conservation of recreation resources for the next 50 years. How can the welfare of our nation’s citizens, outdoor recreationists, communities, environment, and economy be enhanced over the next 50 years through opportunities for the American people to enjoy and experience our great outdoors?

What NARRP proposes is not new, visionary, or revolutionary. What NARRP proposes is not so much about change, but rather follow-through with the wisdom of 1962 ORRRC and many other commissions, conferences, hearings, reports, articles, and speeches since that time.

The three key NARRP recommendations include:

- Establishing Inter-Departmental National Leadership;
- Repositioning the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program; and
- Reframing the Role and Relevancy of Statewide Comprehensive Planning.

We are pleased to submit our report entitled Support for the Great Outdoors America. Perhaps the time is right; the political will for action is sufficient; and the wisdom of national collaboration and coordination will transcend the natural entrapment of our institutional silos. We hope so, and pledge NARRP’s willingness to actively assist in implementing these critical outdoor recreation management strategies.
For more information about NARRP’s Position Paper: Support for the Great Outdoor America, please contact:

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